



Fig. F: Sankat Mochan Road, the main street leading to Sankat Mochan Temple (Bayer 2015)

## Temple Economies: The *Sankat Mochan* Temple as a business enterprise

Keywords: Religious economy, Qualitative research, Hinduism, Worship, Temple

### 1 Introduction: The *Sankat Mochan Temple* as object of research

India is a country with a variety of religions, but with a share of 80.5% Hindus constitute the most numerous group among all religious communities in India (Government of India 2001). Being a religious Hindu implies the performance of different rituals of worship that constitute integral parts of a devotee's daily life because "to the traditional Hindu the religious and the secular life are never truly distinguished" (Michell 1988, 49). These rituals do not just take place in private but also in public. The most obvious places to worship are temples, which are "designed to bring about contact between man and the gods" (Michell 1988, 61). The present research paper takes a closer look at one particularly important temple: the *Sankat Mochan Temple* in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India (Fig. 5.1).

In Varanasi, approximately 23,000 temples can be found (Bansal 2008, 48). The *Sankat Mochan Temple* however is a comparatively famous entity, attracting visitors from all over the country, especially around the time during which festivals take place at the temple. The main god at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is *Hanuman*, also referred to as the "monkey god". He symbolizes devotion, intellect, immortality, power and protection. The latter arises from *Hanuman's* prominent part in the epos *Ramayana*, in which he is portrayed as the "protector of Rama" and "son of the wind" (Lutgendorf 1994, 211). Thus, the *Sankat Mochan Temple* includes not just an idol of *Hanuman* to worship, but also one of *Rama*. It is a popular belief that the temple's establishment can be dated back 500 years: one day, while *Tulsidas*, one of the most famous Hindu poets, sat at the Ganga to recite his epos of *Rama*, *Hanuman* sat down beside him disguised as a leper and listened to him. Thereafter, he led him out of the city into a wooded area, where *Hanuman* revealed his true form, blessed *Tulsidas* and gave him instructions on how he could attain a long desired vision. To show his gratitude *Tulsidas* had an image of *Hanuman* built at the spot where they met - the very place where the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is located today (Lutgendorf 1991).



Fig. 5.1: The main entrance of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* (Bayer 2015)

However, temples like the *Sankat Mochan Temple* are not just buildings with a mythological background providing a place for devotional worship. On the contrary, these temples are complex institutions, constantly in need of keeping the balance between organisational management on a profane level as well as protecting and maintaining its holiness and attractiveness for pilgrims and worshippers.

## 2 Religious Economy as conceptual framework

Religious Economy as an analytical concept has been affiliated with the field of Rational Choice Theory and contributed to a better conceptualisation of the profane aspects of religion (Bankston 2002, 311). Against this background, religious environments - such as temples - are treated as specific economies. In this light, religions, religious groups and religious organisations become business enterprises operating according to market laws. Apart from their role as sanctuaries they can also be regarded as suppliers of goods and services, competing with each other for customers, who make (rational) choices among available products (Bankston 2002, 311). These choices are made based on anticipated rewards the customers want to achieve and on the costs they are attempting to avoid (Stark and Finke 2000, 85 ff., Stark and Bainbridge 1980, 115). It becomes thus apparent that religion is subject to the forces of demand and supply just like material goods are. This includes the notion that belief is not free from an economic interpretation because individuals seek suppliers to satisfy their desire for belief (Bankston 2002, 322). Nevertheless, the employment of Rational Choice Theory should not lead us to overlook that decisions made in the contexts of religion are not mere results of rational thinking aimed at benefit maximisation because they always include the factors of belief and commitment (Bruce 1993, 203 ff., Bankston 2002, 313). Following this thought, “*human reasoning often is somewhat unsystematic and ‘intuitive’*” (Stark 1999, 265).

Contrary to secularisation theory, which claims that secularisation and individuation are consequences of the functional differentiation in modern societies (Dobbelaere 1987, 131 f.), the concept of religious economy and its viewpoint of religions as business enterprises is useful for understanding why religion is still surviving in contemporary pluralistic societies and why the existence of more temples in a certain region leads to even more worship (Bankston 2002, 311, Lang et al. 2005, 150).

Based on the conceptual foundation of religious economy, this study aims to understand how the *Sankat Mochan Temple* functions as a business enterprise in terms of its positioning within the market forces of demand and supply. Against this background, three dimensions will be addressed:

- (1) The supply side: Which features and characteristics constitute the temple’s organisational basis, creating the ‘final product’, which is placed on the market by the temple?
- (2) The demand side: Based on what motives and beliefs do devotees, i.e. customers, choose the *Sankat Mochan Temple* as their preferred place to worship?
- (3) The supply-demand interrelation: How do the visitors contribute to the temple’s ability to maintain its offered product on the market?

### 3 Methodological approach

The research was conducted by using different methods from the field of empirical Human Geography: qualitative interviews, participant observation, counting and mapping. The most frequently utilised method was the problem-centred guideline-based interview, which was conducted with the head of *Sankat Mochan* temple, the employees and the visitors of the temple as well as with the shop owners located in the vicinity of the temple. The outcomes of the open participant observations supplemented the information gained through the interviews and contributed to developing a deeper understanding of the subject. Because the observations were performed without standardisation it was possible to change perspectives during the fieldwork without being constrained by a prior selection of specific aspects (Reuber and Pfaffenbach 2005, 123 ff.)

Mapping and counting are special forms of observation. In this case, the temple visitors were counted at different times of the day and days of the week. This data was used as a basis for an extrapolation in order to gain insight in the popularity of the temple and for an estimation of monetary donations. Finally, the buildings inside of the temple area as well as the surrounding area were mapped to give an overview of the functional segmentation of the temple premises. Following an interpretative paradigm, it needs to be pointed out that the worldview of the observed and interviewed people cannot be fully accessed by these methods. The interviewees' social reality is constituted by subjective interpretation. In turn, qualitative research is always a subjective interpretation of these individual interpretations and therefore absolute neutrality and objectivity cannot be claims of this research (Lamnek 2010, 32; Reuber and Pfaffenbach 2005, 107 ff.). Keeping this in mind, this study's objective is to better understand and put into context the temple's and the devotee's realities.

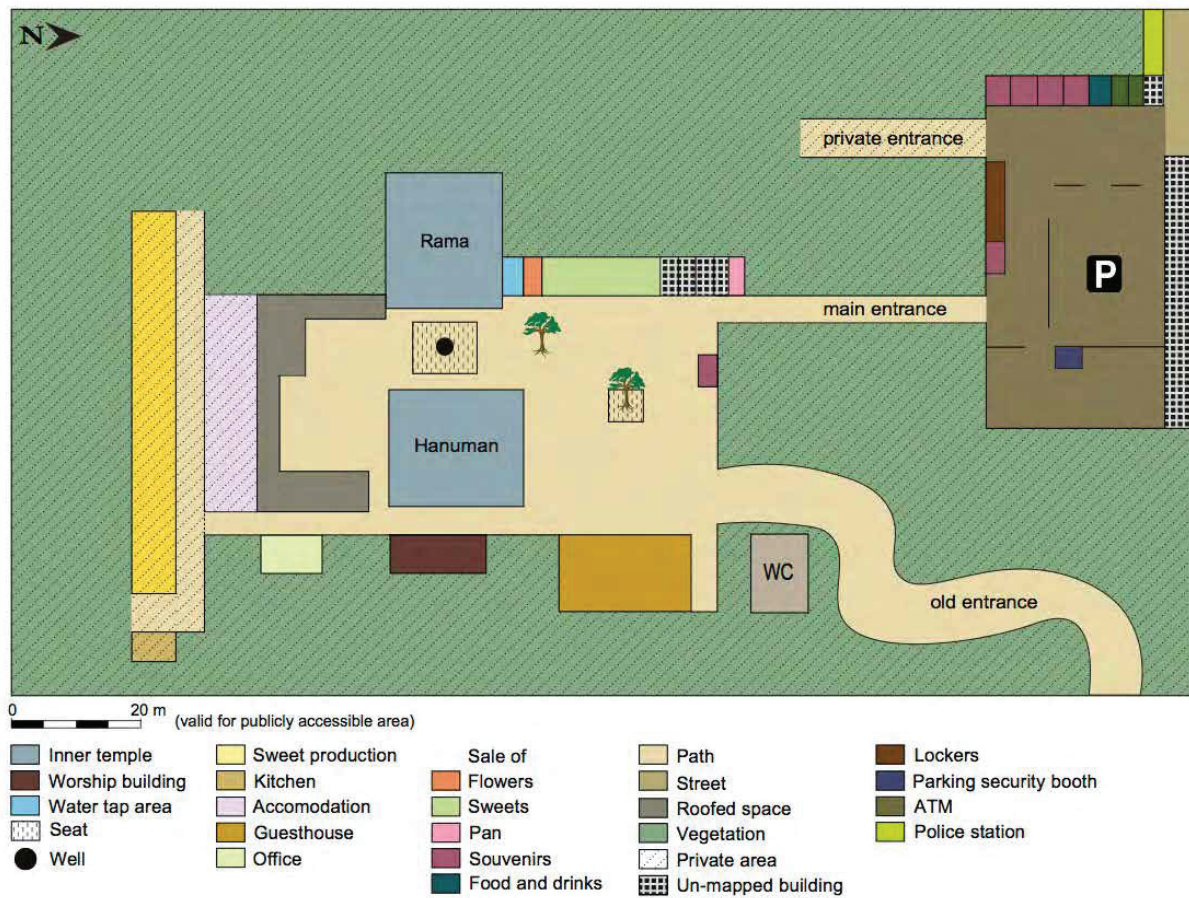
## 4 Results: Taking a secular look at the *Sankat Mochan* Temple

### 4.1 The supply side: The temple's organisational basis

The temple's offered product consists of various features like its "*location, size, design, and the variety of services and goods that is available on-site*" (Lang et al. 2005, 152). A closer look is taken at the characteristics which distinguish the offered product of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* from that of other temples.

The *Sankat Mochan Temple* comprises an area with different functional buildings (Fig. 5.2). The two most significant buildings are the inner temples facing each other: the *Hanuman* and the *Rama* temple, which share three main characteristics concerning their interior design. First, there is the god's idol - *Hanuman* or *Rama* - on the back wall of the temple. Second, there is the donation area in the front space of the inner temples, which comprises of an elongated box for monetary donations and a desk for other types of donations. There are usually one or two priests sitting next to this desk, receiving the donations and giving blessings. Third, there is an idol of the god's feet on top of the donation box, which is also used for receiving blessings. In addition to the inner temples and the other constructional elements, the temple property contains a big green area of around eight acres, sometimes referred to as 'the lungs of Varanasi' that gives home to

several monkeys. This is why the temple serves also as a recreational place, being “a refuge for the urban population” (Lutgendorf 1991).



Design: Vanessa Holm & Melissa Bayer

Figure 5.2: The Sankat Mochan Temple (Source: own design)

The temple is open to the public 20.5 hours per day, 7 days a week. *Aarti* are worship rituals performed by the temple priests whose timings structure the temple’s daily routine, together with two periods during which the inner temples are closed so that the god’s idols cannot be seen (Tab. 5.1).

Tab. 5.1: Opening hours of the Sankat Mochan Temple and daily structures; all times may slightly vary from day to day (Source: own design)

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 3:30                      | Opening of the Sankat Mochan Temple               |
| 4:30                      | Mangla (Morning) Aarti                            |
| 11:00 - 11:15             | Inner temples close for Bhog (Feeding of Hanuman) |
| 12:00 - 15:00             | Inner temples close (Resting of Hanuman)          |
| 15:00                     | Aarti   |
| 20:30                     | Aarti   |
| 23:00 (on Tues. and Sat.) | Shayan (Sleeping) Aarti                           |
| 0.00                      | Closing of the Sankat Mochan Temple               |

In order to keep the temple businesses running it engages a pool of employees and non-employees, who are organised in a complex hierarchy. On the top, there is the main head of the temple (*Mahant*). This position was long occupied by Veer Bhadra Mishra who was

also a professor of hydraulic engineering and founded the *Sankat Mochan Foundation*. Established in 1982 as a registered non-governmental organisation, the foundation's main purpose is to raise public awareness on the pollution of the Ganga and to engage in the political process by providing scientific studies and proposing solutions (Ahmed 1994, 11 ff.). After Veer Bhadra Mishra's death in March 2013 his son Vishwambhar Nath Mishra became the head of the foundation as well as the *Mahant* of the temple, being the spiritual leader and holding the main power of decision with respect to all temple issues. He is also a professor of civil engineering at the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). In addition, there are about 172 people who make a living by working at the temple (Tab. 5.2). The exact quantity is difficult to grasp because it consists of a core of permanent employees and a bigger number of additional people working part-time at the temple. The size of part-time employees varies according to the time of the year (e.g. high seasons due to festivals) and is tied to the temple by loose working agreements, making the labour situation difficult to measure in terms of Eurocentric perspectives on employment.

Table 5.2: Quantity of people working at the temple and type of labour (Source: own design)

| Quantity of people  | Type of labour   |
|---|--|
| People employed and paid by the temple (or through a contractor company)  |  |
| ~ 1   | Supervisor of the employees and other temple issues  |
| ~ 15  | Inner temple priests, performing the most important worship rituals and living at the temple                   |
| ~ 6   | Temple premises priests, performing smaller worship rituals and living outside of the temple                   |
| ~ 8   | Security employees inside of the temple  |
| ~ 15  | Security employees at the two visitors' entrances  |
| ~ 55  | Personnel of the sweet shop inside of the temple (sales and production)  |
| ~ 7   | Sales personnel of the flower shop inside of the temple  |
| ~ 4   | Sales personnel of the pan shop inside of the temple   |
| ~ 2   | Sales personnel of the souvenir shop inside of the temple  |
| ~ 2   | Cleaning staff for the restrooms   |
| ~ 2   | Sweepers   |
| ~ 3   | Kitchen personnel for the daily meals received by some employees   |
| ~ 23  | Employees at the locker space in front of the temple   |
| People using the temple as a working place and receiving payment from their own clients   |  |
| ~ 15  | <i>Jajman</i> (= freelance priests operating on a private basis, i.e. doing worship rituals for their clients) |
| People using the temple as a working place and receiving donations from the visitors, while having to give some of it to the cleaning staff |  |
| ~ 9   | Shoe-guards who watch the visitors' shoes at the entrance area of the temple                                   |
| People volunteering at the temple, being allowed to keep donations from the visitors  |  |
| ~ 4   | Men guarding the smaller one of the two parking areas in front of the temple                                   |
| ~ 1   | Distributor of water at the water tap-area inside of the temple  |

The spiritual employees are the priests, who also eat and sleep inside the temple and are the only ones allowed to give blessings and perform certain rituals. In his book on Hindu temples, Michell points out that the priesthood and the performed rituals are needed “to maintain the continuous presence of the god” (Michell 1988, 62), emphasizing the priests’ high position and relevance.

The security personnel are the only group of employees that comprises not only men but also women. One can differentiate between the personnel working inside the temple area and the personnel working at one of the two visitors’ entrances. Their salaries vary between 3,500 and 5,000 Indian rupee (INR) per month that is received through a security company that in turn is paid by the temple. The high presence of security at the temple is a preventive measure that was put to use after a terrorist attack: one of three parallel bombings in Varanasi in March 2006 occurred at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* during a wedding ritual. Consequently, safety measures were intensified, marriages were prohibited at the temple, and bringing objects like cameras, mobile phones or any kind of weapons was forbidden.

Another major group of employees are the vendors working at the different temple shops. The most profitable is the sweet shop that also accounts for the biggest amount of employees. The sweets are not just sold but also produced at the temple premises and have a citywide reputation for their superior quality. Salaries vary from 4,000 up to 12,000 INR per month, depending on the employee’s position. The hierarchy among the employees is not just represented by different salaries but also through a system that regulates who receives daily meals provided by the temple and who lives at the temple premises.

As depicted in Table 5.2 not all people working at the temple can be seen as temple employees. For example, there are many freelance priests, so-called *Jajman*, who use the temple as their workplace and operate on a private basis. Clients solicit *Puja* (worship) from these *Jajman*, often regarding difficulties with their job, family, relationships or marriage prospects. Against this background, a link to the *Jajmani* system might be drawn. This system establishes exclusive right to services whereby the clientele of an individual who offers these services is called his *Jajmani*. The term stems from the Sanskrit expression *yajman*, meaning ‘the one who employs a Brahmin priest to offer a sacrifice’ (Mayer 1993, 359). This translation directly corresponds to the *Puja* offered by the *Jajman* priests at the *Sankat Mochan Temple*. Usually, a *Jajman* inherits his occupation as well as his clientele by his father (Mayer 1993, 359 ff.). At the *Sankat Mochan Temple* the contact between a *Jajman* and his customers is often long-established through personal networks and their attendant exclusive rights to service. They however also exist beyond these established relations on a more market oriented level when the contact is made through an astrologer who operates his business close to the *Sankat Mochan Temple* and often sends his clients to the temple for the performance of certain rituals. As such, a *Jajman* is either paid by the astrologer or directly by his clients. A special feature of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is that there is no compulsory payment to use the temple premises for this kind of freelance work, contrary to the rules at other temples.

Similarly, the temple does not employ the shoe keepers but tolerates them as long as they pay the cleaning personnel a certain amount of money. In return, they are allowed to keep monetary donations they receive from the visitors.

Aside from the temple's architectural characteristics and the activities performed by the people working at the temple there are some less regular but still important features that contribute to the constitution of the temple's offered product. First, there is the characteristic of "*tributary economy*" (Yang 2005, 146), referring to religious festivals organised by the temple in honour of the gods. In case of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* those include for example the *Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh*, which is a music and dance festival celebrated each year in April and attracting performers and visitors from all over the country. This shows that the temple functions not just as a religious but also as an intellectual and artistic centre of Hindu communities (Michell 1988, 50).

Second, there are the welfare activities of the temple often addressed to the poor (Michell 1988, 60). An example at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* is a regular *Bhandara* during which free food is provided for everyone visiting the temple. Yang summarises those charity acts in his study on Daoist priests in Shanghai under the term "*gift economy*" (Yang 2005, 146).

The above mentioned aspects are directly visible for the visitors. In addition, part of the temple's offered product consists of a less tangible feature. This is the characteristic of non-importunity, meaning that the temple does not explicitly ask for monetary donations from its visitors, contrary to other temples.

Apart from the physical presence of the gods' idols, another important characteristic of the temple is the commonly believed spiritual presence of *Hanuman*. Hence, the temple does not just provide a place for devotional worship in general but a place that offers the specific possibility to contact *Hanuman*. Altogether, these elements create a unique atmosphere together constituting the product offered by the *Sankat Mochan Temple*.

#### 4.2 The demand side: visitors and devotions

The model of religious economy implies that there is a competition between different suppliers. Having established the nature of the offered product of the *Sankat Mochan Temple*, a closer look at the demand side is needed to understand why devotees choose precisely this temple among other suppliers. Undoubtedly, the *Sankat Mochan Temple* has a strong market position as becomes evident when looking at the high numbers of daily visitors (Tab. 5.3). The amount of visitors varies according to the daily closing times of the two inner temples and to the common belief that Tuesdays and Saturdays are the best days to worship *Hanuman*. But what brings the devotees in such remarkable numbers to the *Sankat Mochan Temple*? The visitors' main motive is *Darshan* as one of the most important aspects of Hindu worship enabling the visual perception of the sacred. It is believed that the contact between devotee and deity is established through the eyes, and seeing is perceived as touching while the touch is the ultimate connection between devotee and deity (Eck 1998, 3 ff.). One of the best places to constitute this contact is a temple because it is assumed that the temple "*is setting out to dissolve the boundaries between man and the divine*" (Michell 1988, 61). This becomes apparent while looking at

Tab. 5.3: Number of temple visitors coming through the main entrance within one hour at different times of the day and days of the week (Source: own design)

| Day of the week                      | Time of the day | Total visitors |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Friday, 20 <sup>th</sup> Feb. 2015   | 10:40 - 11:40   | 480            |
| Saturday, 21 <sup>st</sup> Feb. 2015 | 12:00 - 13:00   | 643            |
| Monday, 23 <sup>rd</sup> Feb. 2015   | 12:20 - 13:20   | 277            |
| Tuesday, 24 <sup>th</sup> Feb. 2015  | 09:40 - 10:40   | 1,591          |



the different steps of a typical temple visit that form one whole devotional process. Among others, those steps include leaving the shoes at the entrance area, getting blessed by touching the symbolic feet of the god, and the circumambulation of the inner temple while touching the exterior walls with one's fingers or forehead to be closer to the god. Here it becomes evident that even though religious experiences are very personal, a common emotional experience can be distinguished, and this shared experience is likely to be evoked by architectural and decorative temple items (Finlayson 2012, 1775).

Even though the interviewed visitors associate *Darshan* with more individual aspects like mental peace, strength, relaxing, meditating and spirituality, *Darshan* remains a general motive for worship and does not yet explain why the devotees choose the *Sankat Mochan Temple* and not any other temple. One answer to this question lies in the temple's name: *Sankat Mochan* means "removal of all sufferings" (Ahmed 1994, 11) or "liberator from distress" (Lutgendorf 2002, 72). This connotation is reflected in the different problems named by the interviewed visitors for which they want to receive blessings while being at the temple. Those include marriage, family troubles, job problems, upcoming exams or sickness.

Moreover, all devotees agree that coming to the *Sankat Mochan Temple* does not just mean to get into contact with any god, but specifically to be close to *Hanuman*. The popularity of *Hanuman* is also represented by the *Hanumancalisa* - forty verses addressed to *Hanuman* written by *Tulsidas* - which is a commonly known religious text in Northern India (Lutgendorf 1991). According to the visitors, *Hanuman* gives strength, intelligence and knowledge and does not distinguish between the rich and the poor. The latter aspect is connected to the temple's feature of not intrusively asking money from its visitors and therefore constitutes a major motive of the devotees.

Nonetheless, nearly no one is actually visiting the temple without giving an offering. The most popular donations are flowers and sweets, either bought at one of the shops outside of the temple or at the temple-owned shops inside. Less obvious, but not necessarily less frequent, are monetary donations. However, the interviews show that the intention of donating is to give something to the god, not to the temple. This is not just an intention but also a strong belief, which becomes especially evident in the devotees' perplexity when asked what they think the temple does with their donations. Hence, donating at the temple can be interpreted as an exchange between devotee and god, while the donation serves as an incentive for the god to help the devotee to overcome his or her problems. Lutgendorf adds that *Hanuman* is an "easily propitiated god" and that he "gets things done" (Lutgendorf 1994, 243). This characteristic of *Hanuman* is directly linked to the devotees' belief that *Hanuman* has the power to release them from their problems. Thus, 'liberator of distress' is not just a translation of *Sankat Mochan* but also serves as a title given to *Hanuman*.

### 4.3 The supply-demand interrelation: Maintaining the market position

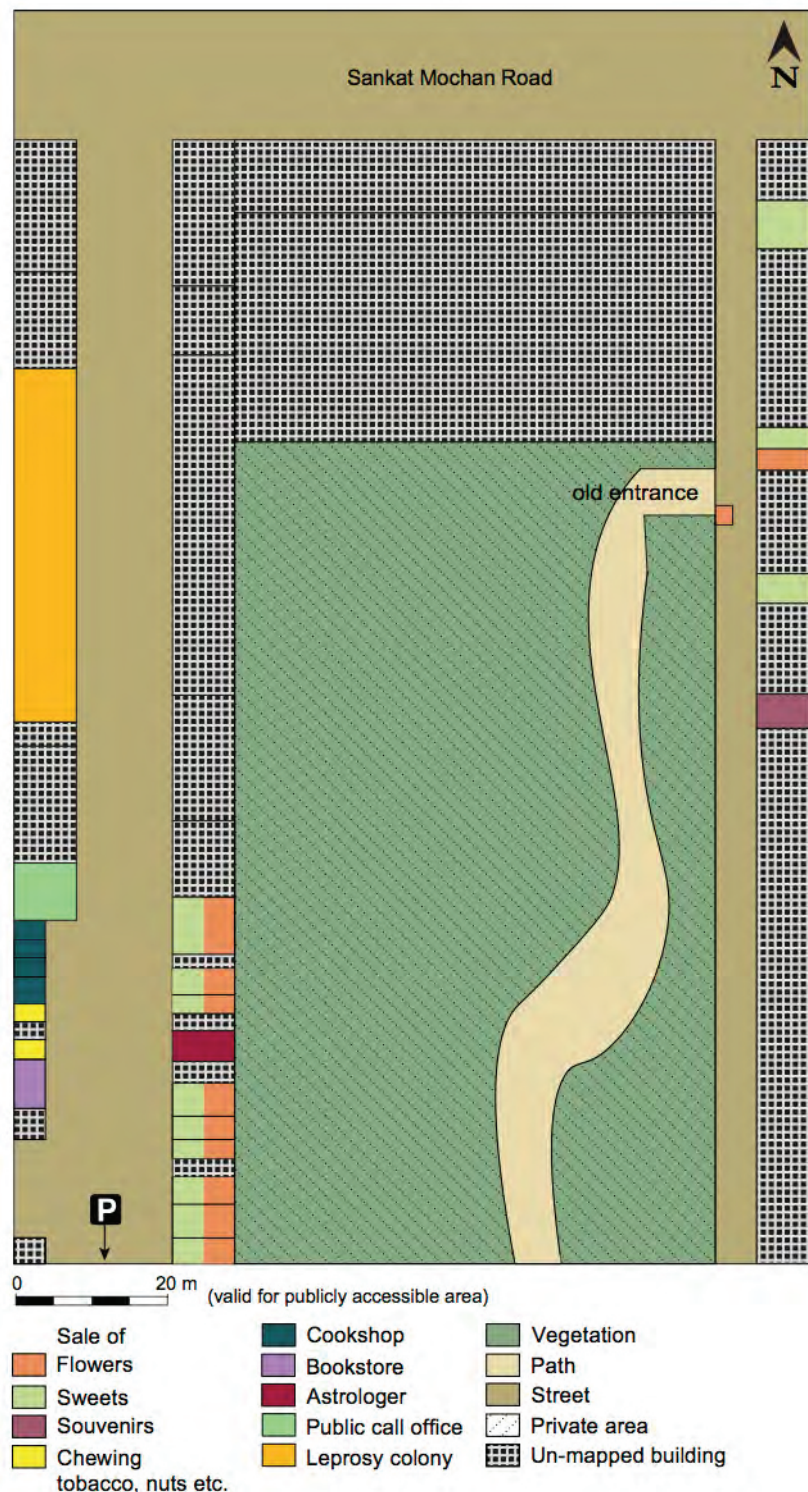
The devotees make use of the temple as they choose it for worship, but in turn the temple profits from them. First, by communicating their belief they contribute to the popularity of the temple and thereby attract more visitors. Second, they fund the temple on a monetary basis because the revenue of the worshippers can be assumed to be the major income source of the temple (Lang et al. 2005, 150). This revenue is either created in the form of monetary donations or in the form of profits made by the temple shops. Concerning the latter, the temple decides the final prices of the flowers and sweets: at the sweet shop *Laddu* are sold for 220 INR per kilo, *Peda* and *Khowa* for each 240 INR per kilo, and special types of sweets for around 300 INR per kilo. The employees claim that they produce an average of 500 kilos per day and that usually everything is sold. Assuming an average price per kilo of 230 INR this would make a daily income of 115,000 INR. Moreover, the additional costs of the production are comparatively low because the *Mahant* owns his own cows and buffalos for milk production. All other raw materials, including ghee and sugar, are bought at a market and brought to the temple where they are further processed. Consequently, it can be assumed that the profit made by the sweet shop is very high. Even if it assumed that everybody of the 55 sweet shop employees would gain 8,000 INR per month, all those salaries could be paid by the income generated by the sweet shop within less than four days, excluding the cost of material.

The issue of monetary donations remains rather unclear in terms of their quantity. Yet, when taking the results illustrated in Table 5.3 as a basis an hourly average of 748 temple visitors can be extrapolated. Since the temple is opened 20.5 hours per day, this would amount to 15,334 visitors daily - and this number only refers to the visitors who came through the main gate. While these figures are not representative, they give a coarse impression of how many donations the temple gains on a daily basis when imagining that every visitor would donate only one INR. Because these monetary offerings are usually made anonymously they are not perceived as income and therefore do not need to be taxed, making them an attractive source of revenue for the temple (Gosh 2011). Additionally, there are larger donations made by wealthy private persons, who use the donation receipt to lower their tax payments. In the past, those persons also donated in the form of construction work at the temple, keeping the maintenance costs of the temple at a lower level. These contributions from the outside have a long history. Michell states that private individuals, groups of individuals, royal patrons and guilds of wealthy merchants always played important parts in the support of temple architecture (Michell 1988, 51 ff.).

According to all informants involved in the temple's affairs, the monetary donations are used for institutional and not for personal purposes, namely to pay the salaries of the employees, to cover maintenance costs and expenses connected to festivals organised by the temple, as well as to provide welfare activities. In addition to the devotee-temple interrelation, the temple also has a connection to its neighbourhood, and numerous shops are located at both roads leading to the two entrances of the temple (Fig. 5.3). All of these shops benefit from their location since their customers are almost exclusively visitors of the *Sankat Mochan Temple*. Even though one could argue that these shops pose a threat

to the temple shops in terms of competition, the observations in the field did not prove this to be true. On the contrary, the outside shops seem to be beneficial for the temple because their existence plays a part in the perception of the temple in the eyes of potential visitors. For example, a devotee might be more likely to visit the temple when he or she can combine the temple visit with a meal or tea at one of the shops next door.

Moreover, there is a special economic relation to the shops and the ATMs located at the ground floor of the building next to the parking space (Fig. 5.2) because Vishwambhar Nath Mishra's family owns the building. Hence, all shop owners and both banks need to pay rent. Yet, the rent cannot necessarily be seen as income sources of the temple because it remains unclear if the landlord is Vishwambhar Nath Mishra as a private person or as the *Mahant* of the temple. It is a common feature of Hindu temples to become landlords because many of them invested in land as they became wealthier. This land was usually leased to tenants in the name of god, reminding them "that they only temporarily held sacred land" (Michell 1988, 59). This feature corresponds with the statement of the



Design: Vanessa Holm & Melissa Bayer

Figure 5.3: The neighborhood of the Sankat Mochan Temple

interviewed tenants that they would have to leave immediately if the *Mahant* asked them to. Aside from the visitors themselves and the contribution of the outside shops, the temple has another way of maintaining its market position: it communicates its festivals

through poster advertisement and it has a high presence in daily life in Varanasi because of the activities of the identically named foundation.

## 5 Interpretation: The *Sankat Mochan Temple* as a business enterprise

### 5.1 The supply side

The final product offered by the temple comprises of different dimensions. First, there is the physical temple environment. This aspect includes the structure and architecture of the buildings, the statues, the idols and pictures of the gods, the green area hosting the monkeys, as well as the symbolism of the colours, shapes and orientations of the temple elements (Kong 1992, 8 ff.). Following the concept of *Darshan* the importance of the physical characteristics should not be underestimated since the contact to the god is established through the eyes. As Kong puts it in her study on religious buildings in Singapore, “*seeing is believing*” (Kong 1992, 10).

Second, the different activities fulfilled by the temple employees play an important role in constituting the temple’s offered goods and services. The most important ones include the rituals and ceremonies performed by the priests since “*performing these ceremonies [...] re-infuses the temple and its images with sanctity*” (Kong 1992, 5). In this context, non-employees like the *Jajman* are important as well. They are attracted by the temple as consumers and at the same time they contribute to the temple’s final product in their role as suppliers of ritual expertise offering their services at the temple premises. Aside from these ritual activities there are the secular services offered by the temple shops, out of which the sweet shop attracts most visitors.

Third, specific events like festivals and welfare services organised by the temple are important factors because they contribute to a specific common and very positive perception of the temple.

Fourth, there is the atmospheric characteristic of the temple, namely that it constitutes itself as a place for everyone most importantly reflected by the feature of not intrusively asking for monetary donations.

Fifth, the temple offers the possibility to contact *Hanuman* who is “*one of the most popular and ubiquitous of Hindu deities*” (Lutgendorf 2002, 71). Hence, the *Sankat Mochan Temple* does not just place a product on the market, but the temple itself can be seen as the final product that available to the public 20.5 hours per day, seven days a week.

### 5.2 The demand side

As a result of the temple’s characteristics a remarkable quantity of visitors is attracted. Uniting all of them are deep beliefs in their gods, and devotional processes like visiting the temple are main elements of their daily routine.

While *Darshan* reflects the general desire to get into contact with the god, the meaning of *Sankat Mochan* in terms of ‘removal of all sufferings’ and ‘liberator from distress’ is the main motive for choosing to visit the *Sankat Mochan Temple*. The belief that being released from one’s problems through worship at this temple stems mainly from *Hanuman* as a deity, who is perceived to have the power to fulfil wishes without asking for much in return. Hence - even if all characteristics of the temple’s organisational basis contribute to its popularity - the most important feature for the devotees seems to be the possibility to

contact *Hanuman*. While this appears to be a very religious motive, it is at the same time very profane because it is related to the worldly desire of getting one's individual wishes fulfilled. Consequently, the above-mentioned exchange between deity and devotee in the context of donating food, flowers and money to the god can be interpreted as a patron-client relationship (Rösel 1983, 56). As Stark puts it, "*the single difference [...] between exchanges involving only humans and exchanges when one of the partners is a god is that the latter can involve far more valuable payoffs. Aside from that, in their dealings with the gods, people bargain, shop around, procrastinate, weigh costs and benefits, skip installment payments, and even cheat*" (Stark 1999, 286). Thus, the relationship between god and visitor fluctuates between the world of the secular and the sacred but takes place within the temple setting. This setting is commonly perceived to be sacred and to have a transcendent and transformative nature, which induces the visitors' emotional experiences (Kong 1992, 4 f., Finlayson 2012, 1763).

### 5.3 The supply-demand interrelation

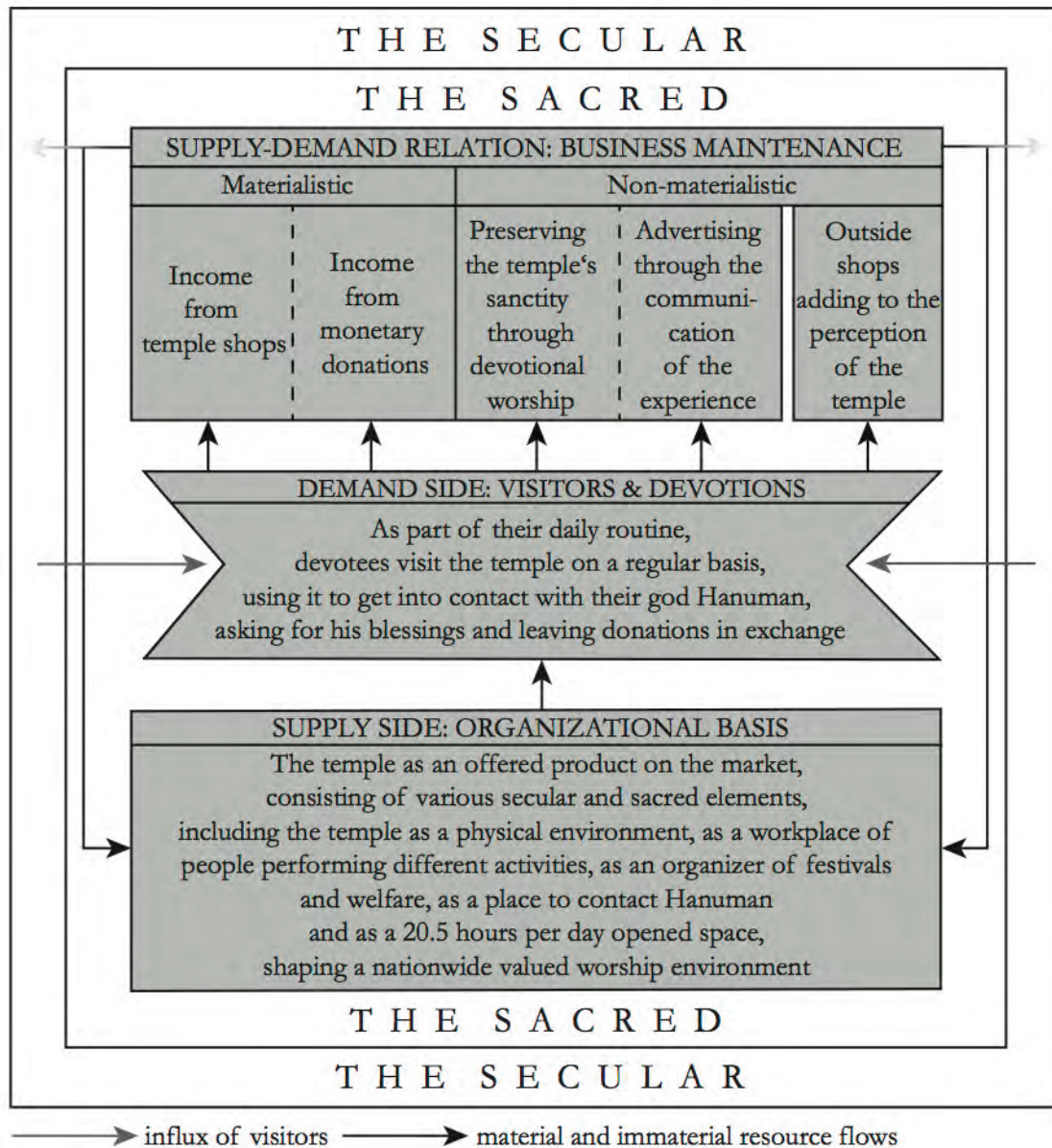
The devotees, i.e. the consumers of the goods and services of faith provided by the temple, are at the same time producers (Bankston 2002, 322). This becomes evident as they contribute to the maintenance of the temple's market position in both a non-materialistic and a materialistic way (Fig. 5.4). Concerning the former, two different activities can be distinguished. First, the devotees communicate their sacred experience and thereby advertise for the temple. Second, the devotees contribute to the preservation of the sanctity of the temple. One perspective in research is that nothing is inherently sacred but is made sacred by ritual (Smith 1987, 104). By contrast, in the case of the *Sankat Mochan Temple* it is believed that it has an inherent sanctity stemming from the myth regarding its establishment. Either way, it can be said that through a "*process of sacralization*" (Finlayson 2012, 1776) the temple is (re-)infused with sanctity. This is done through rituals performed by priests but also through the devotees' devotional worship (Kong 1992, 16).

In terms of the materialistic contribution it is true that the donation boxes at the *Sankat Mochan Temple* are not obviously placed and do not have any indicating labels as is often the case at other temples. Yet, it is not deniable that people leave money anyway - either at the donation boxes or the temple shops - and that this is the temple's major income source even though the donations are meant for the god, not the temple.

The information on the quantity and the direction of the cash flows stay rather opaque. An explanation for this circumstance is given by the concept of the god "*as a mighty landlord*" (Rösel 1983, 54). Hereby, *Hanuman* is perceived as a territorial landlord and as the managing director of the temple. On the one hand, he is seen as a god living in the world of the sacred but, on the other hand, he has mundane desires like eating and sleeping that need to be met by the social reciprocity between deity and human. Hereby, the god enters the world of the secular and "*becomes predictable, a prognostic fact*" (Rösel 1983, 55). This phenomenon is also reflected through the aforementioned patron-client relationship in terms of donating.

Apart from the devotees, the shops surrounding the temple also contribute to the temple's market position as they add to a positive perception of the temple in the minds of the visitors. Moreover, the temple has its own way of increasing its public presence, e.g. by

advertising its festivals. Even if not intended by the temple, this can be described as strategies of promotion and marketing (Lang et al. 2005, 152).



Design: Melissa Bayer

Fig. 5.4: The Sankat Mochan Temple as a business enterprise

## 6 Conclusion: The interconnection of the secular and the sacred

In India, there is no clear-cut separation between the secular and the sacred and the boundaries between these two spheres remain blurry (Michaels 1998, 260). This is true for the visitors' daily lives as well as for the temple's constitution. The study showed that within the *Sankat Mochan Temple* and also beyond there is a strong interrelation between the three spheres of economic, social and ritual activities because a single activity might include elements of all three dimensions (Rösel 1983, 45 ff.). The difficulty of revealing the temple's economic activities, i.e. the financial resource flows, lies within religion

itself because it functions as a cover for certain economic aspects. Depending on the acting agent this masking is performed either purposely or unintentionally. How this is done becomes most evident in the concept of the god as a landlord and temple manager because this model serves as justification for an alleged lack of knowledge concerning the quantity and use of monetary donations.

A useful concept for understanding how the different spheres are connected is the model of religious economy that was utilised in this study to reveal how the *Sankat Mochan Temple* functions as an extremely successful religious business. It became clear that the temple as a sacred place has to be organised and managed in a secular way, like every other institution of modern society. Likewise, its organisational basis comprises sacred as well as secular elements together forming the temple into a unique product. Hence, we need to look at temples not as passive constructions but as “*active players*” (Lang et al. 2005, 178) and treat them as part of the secular economic market system if we want to expand our knowledge on how they are functioning and surviving.

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